

Message Text

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ACTION IO-11

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C O N F I D E N T I A L USUN 0723

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EGEN, UN, WFC

SUBJ: FAO/MEETING OF DIRECTOR GENERAL SAOUMA WITH WEO

REF: USUN 701

1. WEO'S CONVENED AMBASSADORIAL-LEVEL MEETING
FEBRUARY 25. THE NEW DIRECTOR GENERAL OF FAO ATTENDED
AND SHARED HIS VIEWS ON THE PRESENT STATUS AND FUTURE OF
FAO AND THE AGENCY'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UN SYSTEM.
HE ASKED FOR THIS MEETING BECAUSE HE DID NOT INTEND TO
BE AS FORTHCOMING AND SPECIFIC IN HIS FORMAL PRESENTATION
TO THE AD HOC COMMITTEE ON RESTRUCTURING.

2. SAOUMA DEMONSTRATED CONSIDERABLE AND AGGRESSIVE
OPPOSITION TO THE PRESENT BLURRED RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN
FAO, THE WORLD FOOD COUNCIL, AND THE CONSULTATIVE GROUP
ON FOOD PRODUCTION AND INVESTMENT. HE WARNED THAT AN
EXPANDED OPERATIONAL ROLE FOR THE WORLD FOOD COUNCIL
COULD RESULT IN DIFFICULTIES BETWEEN HIS GOVERNING COUNCIL
AND THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY. HE QUESTIONED THE ANACHRONISM
WHICH PUTS THE WORLD FOOD COUNCIL DE FACTO UNDER
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AND WITHIN FAO BUT LEFT TO ITS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR A COORDINATING

AND POSSIBLY SUPERVISORY ROLE IN RESPECT TO WORLD AGRICULTURE. HE REJECTED THE NOTION OF A JOINT SECRETARIAT, INSISTING THAT OFFICIALS SHOULD HAVE A SINGLE LOYALTY EITHER TO THE COUNCIL OR TO FAO. THE DIRECTOR GENERAL SUGGESTED THAT WHILE THE RELATIONSHIPS WITH JOHN HANNAH ARE CORDIAL AND SATISFACTORY, THERE WAS NO ASSURANCE THAT THIS HARMONIOUS PARTNERSHIP WOULD ENDURE WHEN A SUCCESSOR TO HANNAH IS DESIGNATED. FYI: WE ARE RELIABLY INFORMED THAT SAOUMA PARTICULARLY FEARS THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE SECRETARY GENERAL WILL APPOINT A YOUNGER, MORE COMPETITIVE PERSONALITY TO HEAD THE WORLD FOOD COUNCIL ON HANNAH'S DEPARTURE. END FYI. WITH RESPECT TO THE CONSULTATIVE GROUP, SAOUMA INDICATED THAT HE HAD SUCCESSFULLY SOUGHT THE CONCURRENCE OF IBRD PRESIDENT MCNAMARA AND A DECISION TO REVIEW THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAO AND THE CONSULTATIVE GROUP. HE EXPRESSED BOTH THE HOPE AND BELIEF THAT HE WOULD ULTIMATELY HAVE TO REACH AN ACCOMMODATION WITH THE MARTIN GROUP, SINCE BOTH THE CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON FOOD PRODUCTION AND INVESTMENT (CGFPI) AND THE WORLD FOOD COUNCIL (WFC) ARE CREATURES OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

3. SAOUMA EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE THAT THERE WOULD BE NO CONFLICT WITH THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAM, SINCE IT WAS LARGELY SUBJECT TO HIS BUDGETARY SCRUTINY AND TO DIRECTION BY AN EXECUTIVE HEAVILY ACCOUNTABLE TO HIM. IN THE CASE OF IFAD, SAOUMA REGISTERED SLIGHT SKEPTICISM, BEING UNSURE OF THE ULTIMATE WORKING ROLE OF THIS FINANCIAL GIANT IN RELATIONSHIP TO ONGOING PROGRAMS OF FAO. AGAIN, HE HINTED THAT HIS POSITION IS CONDITIONED BY THE FACT THAT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY HAD SPAWNED THE INSTITUTION.

4. THE DIRECTOR GENERAL CALLED ATTENTION TO THE CURRENT FINANCIAL CRISIS IN UNDP AND CITED THE SEVERE FINANCIAL AND PERSONNEL CONSTRAINTS WHICH THIS SITUATION CAST UPON FAO'S OPERATIONS. HE EXPRESSED CONSIDERABLE DOUBT THAT FAO SHOULD IN THE FUTURE RELY SOLELY UPON UNDP FOR THE CONDUCT OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND ARGUES THAT THERE CAN BE LITTLE OR NO OBJECTION TO HIS MOUNTING A MINIMAL TA PROGRAM UNDER FAO'S AUSPICES FROM SAVINGS ACHIEVED WITHIN HIS AUTHORIZED BUDGET. THUS, IT IS CLEAR THAT SAOUMA WOULD LIKE TO

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COMMENCE A REDUCTION IN HIS INVOLVEMENT AS AN EXECUTING AGENT OF THE UNDP. FYI: WE ARE RELIABLY ADVISED THAT THE DIRECTOR GENERAL IS IN FACT SERIOUSLY CONSIDERING AN ATTEMPT TO MOVE LARGELY AWAY FROM UNDP SPONSORSHIP TO A POSITION OF NEAR INDEPENDENCE IN THE AREA OF AGRICULTURAL SECTOR DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY. END FYI.

5. SUBSEQUENT TO HIS MEETING WITH THE WEO'S, SAOUMA HELD

EXTENSIVE CONSULTATIONS WITH THE ARAB AND AFRICAN GROUPS
IN WHICH HE WAS EVEN MORE EMPHATIC IN THE EXPRESSION OF
HIS VIEWS.

6. HE LATER MET WITH UNDP ADMINISTRATOR MORSE.
BENNETT

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